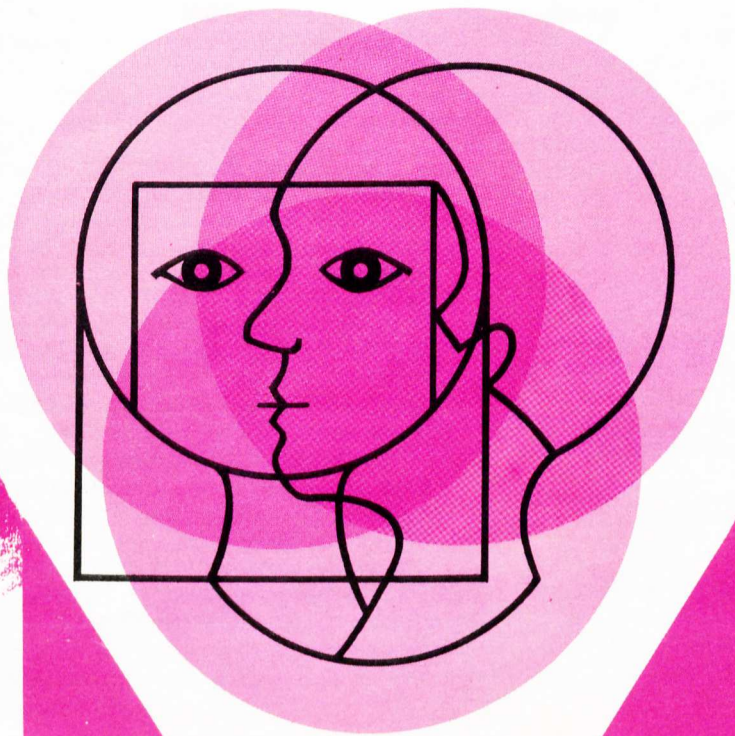
putting woman in her place



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notes

The articles on pages 2-7 provide background for the Bible studies found on pages 8-13. The Bible studies are simple and brief in their format and are intended to help individuals or groups examine the Bible passages in a fruitful way.

Having considered the background articles and the Biblical material, the reports made to General Assembly on this subject in recent years may then be of considerable interest. These are found on pages 14-16.

The Bible study material was fashioned in Committee, out of the Committee's own study process. The editor, however, takes the responsibility for having enlarged and reworked this material to improve it for group study purposes. The background material on pages 2-5 was written by Rev. George Douglas, Librarian of Knox College.

THE COMMITTEE ON THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

Editor — Robert P. Carter
Designer — Barbara Sprague

putting woman in her place

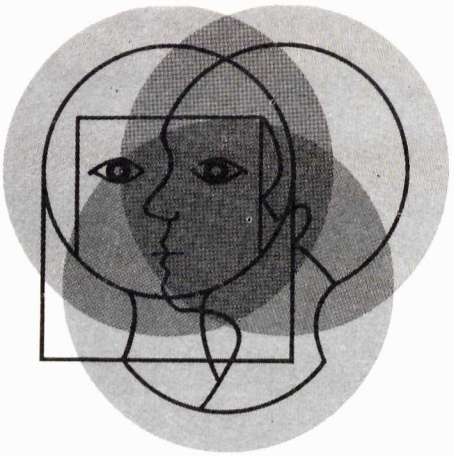
a study guide on the place of women in the church

The purpose of this booklet is to stimulate thought and discussion among our people regarding the place of women in the Church. It does not present any particular position on this subject but simply seeks to focus attention on the various issues in the light of the Bible. Production of the booklet has been the joint effort of the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church and co-operating members of the Committee on Articles of Faith. Publication has been made possible by the Board of Christian Education. The material is made available in the hope and confidence that if our people will expose themselves to the witness of the Scriptures, God will enable the Church to understand and act according to His will in regard to the function women should fulfill as members of the Body of Christ.

Considerable attention has been given to this subject through the years in the courts of the Church and it is hoped that this study guide will prove useful as sessions and presbyteries continue to grapple with it. In particular, however, we hope that in each congregation men and women will gather with their minister to study and discuss this material during the coming months. We suggest a minimum of six meetings with each participant being provided with a copy of the booklet. The Committee will appreciate being informed of any reactions or findings the study may produce.

In effect we are now calling our whole Church to participate in the work of the Committee by engaging in the same basic procedure we have been following, so that finally, under the guidance of God, the whole Church may be led to a common mind on this important subject and to such action as we can believe to be in accordance with His will.

Eoin S. Mackay, Convener
General Assembly's Committee on the
Place of Women In the Church



co-humanity and the covenant

This is a summary of an article in *Theology Today,* April, 1962, by Mrs. Henrietta Visser't Hooft. Her thesis is that in original creation woman was required to complement and complete man as a creature; consequently the covenant relationship between humanity and God implies that there already exists a covenant relationship within humanity itself, that of man and woman in what the author calls "co-humanity". In the fact that humanity is inexorably divided into two sexes we are faced with one of those formidable conditions of life's structure which determine what life itself is.

I

Mrs. Visser't Hooft draws upon the writings of Karl Barth, famous Swiss theologian, and Martin Buber, noted Jewish philosopher.

From Barth she derives the creation analogy. Man (male-alone) is the only creature of all creation which was not regarded by the Creator as good-in-itself. Whereas in the case of all else God looked on it and pronounced it "good", of man He said, "It is not good that man should be alone".

Man *alone* is "not good" as God's partner in the Covenant which is the goal of creation. In order to become "good" in this relationship man must know and practice on his own level a personal relationship which corresponds to God's relation to man. This, Barth teaches, is what Scripture means by the Image of God.

In the Creation story we see how man-alone, unfulfilled, co-operates in his own fulfillment; he must search for a "thou" that will awaken his consciousness of self. The creation of man (humanity) is not complete until woman appears.

The "I-thou" analogy is Buber's contribution. The basis of his thinking is the principle of dialogue in which the I-Thou relationship is taken as representative of spiritual life.

> "The Spirit's aim is communication. Isolated by itself in man, it sleeps, whatever lofty dreams the mystic may project."

Therefore Buber calls the I-Thou relationship the primal reality.

So, in the Genesis story, man (male) seeks for his "thou" in the only place available, the animal world. He remains unfulfilled, without knowing why. But the question has been raised in his mind; so when God puts him to sleep he is aware of "a lack, a missing presence". He is thus prepared to utter "this at last," when he awakens to find his partner already there.

> "At the moment that the Creator leads the woman to him, man recognizes that 'this' one belongs to the same order as himself, an order unknown until then".

Adam's recognition is here described as an answer to the Creator. The next step must be the further recognition: "thou at last", in which is implied man's dawning appreciation of the woman as his true partner in the Covenant, no longer as an impersonal "this", but a genuine "thou" for his "I". But, "at this delicate moment of creation", the process is interrupted by the entrance of the arch-fiend.

II

The fall is an important phase in the Biblical study of the man-woman relationship. The respective parts played by the woman and the man in the Genesis story raises the question of whether the woman was more to blame than the man. Mrs. Visser't Hooft says that through the ages the woman has usually been regarded as the chief culprit. Although not mentioned in the article, support for this view is often found in the Bible, as in I Timothy 2:14, which says:

> "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." (A.V.)

According to Mrs. Visser't Hooft, this kind of speculation is unwarranted. It implies an autonomy and self-realization on the part of each which was not yet attained. They were not yet fully responsible. Self-realization was only on the way; they were becoming self-aware and the fall was an integral part of the becoming.

> "Not yet responsible as a full-fledged partner in the Covenant, the couple can be easily separated and seduced by a promise of further self-realization. There are theologians who reproach Adam for not having rushed to Eve's rescue, in accordance with the saying 'united we stand' (l'union fait la force), but they forget that this union did not yet exist. The serpent must have been a good psychologist. In spite of the warning that she must not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, a warning that she had heard and repeated but not fully grasped (knowledge of good and evil only being realized after eating the forbidden fruit, not before), Eve must have felt that she acted on a positive urge by eating the fruit and handing it to her companion. Adam, too, must have been convinced that this act meant further development and progress. His answer to the Creator is proof of that: 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.' He thinks that this answer warrants his justification. How deceived they both must have felt! Their eyes were opened too late!"

The article goes on to say that while we might want to leave the story of the fall alone, it won't leave us alone. The question is asked as to whether its mission is "to disturb us and urge us on to rediscover the right relationship between man and woman as well as between man and his neighbor?"

III

Commenting upon what happened after the fall, the writer draws inferences from the arresting of the development of the covenant-partner. She says that in the course of history, "man-alone" (the male) has tried to turn distress into virtue, and claim: "It is good that man should be alone," thus contradicting the Creator's words.

The result of this has been to put man over against woman, with woman automatically becoming "man's helpmeet behind him or at his side, trying perhaps to go one better herself". The acceptance of the male as the norm of humanity is evidenced in the familiar assertion that woman is "just as able as man", and is based on the theory that man-alone is good.

(It would be just as wrong, of course, to use woman as the norm, and even to flatter man by saying he was just as able as woman, but this does not seem to be so prevalent an attitude.)

The acceptance of the male as the norm of humanity is said in the article to go back into antiquity. As an illustration the author cites a document recently brought to light in northern Egypian excavations, namely, the apocryphal (fictitious) *Gospel of Thomas,* which is ranked in importance with the Dead Sea Scrolls. One fragment reads as follows:

> "Simon Peter said to Jesus, 'Let us get rid of Mariham, for women are unworthy of life'. Jesus said, 'Give her to me that I may lead her; I will change her into a man that she may get a spirit like man's. Women who masculinize themselves shall be admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven' ".

The same document contains the well known declaration, "In Christ there is neither man nor woman and in the Kingdom of

Heaven there will be no men and no women." The inconsistency is not explained, but Mrs. Visser't Hooft suggests the possibility that the latter is inserted as a refutation of what may have been general opinion in those days, as exemplified in the Simon Peter episode.

Carrying out the implications of Mrs. Visser't Hooft's arguments, "it is evident that neither male nor female is the norm of humanity. It is quite fallacious, therefore, to adopt the attitude that woman demonstrates her 'equality' with man by becoming more like him. There is no such thing as equality or inequality in the man-woman relationship. If they were equal to each other, man and woman would never be able to complement each other in the covenant of co-humanity. To talk of inequality, on the other hand, is to suggest that superiority and inferiority are to be overcome in a movement towards equality.

The truth is that in complementing each other male and female must preserve their distinct identities and essential characters which contribute effectively to the I-Thou relationship. The two are not one in any sense that would suggest a minimizing of the difference between them."

IV

At this point Mrs. Visser't Hooft is taken to task by another writer in the same journal, Valerie Goldstein, who was given access to Mrs. Visser't Hooft's script before making her critical remarks. She claims that the author does not sufficiently emphasize the difference between the sexes within the unity of their co-existence. Since each is incomplete without the other, the only way in which their mutually complementary character and function can be maintained is by recognizing fully what is already a basic fact, namely, that each one is distinct from and different to the other. If one tends to become absorbed in the other, or subservient to the other, the complementing power of both is impaired, and humanity becomes less than it was meant to be, incapable of being the Covenant-partner of God. For this Covenant relationship demands not just humanity, but co-humanity.

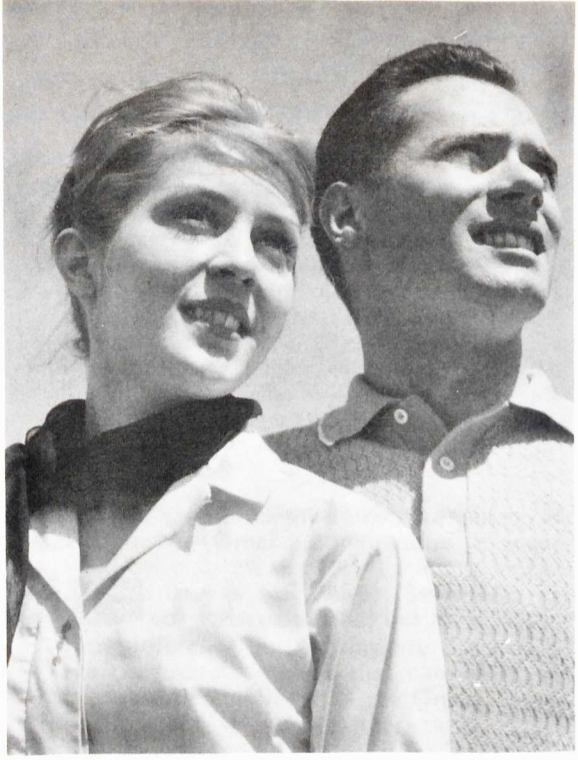
"It is simply a *fact* that in every society a man is subject, from earliest infancy onward, to certain kinds of experiences which are very different to the experiences of a woman. Because men and women experience their bodies and their respective roles in the reproductive process differently, it happens that traits and tendencies common to both sexes as human beings are more decisively emphasized in one sex than in the other, without, however, eliminating the de-emphasized elements. I believe that the resulting polarity and complementarity of the sexes, with regard to qualities which both require for the fulfillment of their essential humanity, account for the power and paradigmatic character of sexuality in human experience."

The weakness that this writer finds in Mrs. Visser't Hooft is more a lack of emphasis than a failure to recognize significant facts.

While the difference between the sexes is at least implied in Mrs. Visser't Hooft's treatment of the I-Thou relationship, she tends to look askance at the way some theologians distribute *charismata* (gifts of grace, as in I Corinthians 12) between man and woman. Familiar, she says, is the claim that "man is created for action, woman for being". It is left for the hearer to conclude how each of these categories is to be defined. She concludes that in this world of man-alone, the type of "being" which seems to impose itself on woman is to be on guard! Woman should exercise this by learning "to distinguish between monologue and dialogue, to unmask false dialogue, to discover even the smallest attempt at true dialogue and encourage it." In this attempt, woman will learn discrimination, and receive training in the right attitudes for true dialogue. The rest, Mrs. Visser't Hooft thinks, is up to God.

For the purpose of our study of the problem, is it too irreverent to suggest that God may be doing some of "the rest" by putting people to work on a truly Biblical perspective, the loss of which over the centuries cries out for a reformation in our Church and in our time?

male and female He created them



Photograph by Harold M. Lambert.

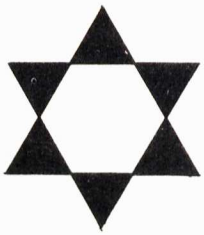
Professor Paul Ramsey of the Department of Religion in Princeton University, and author of a standard text book, *Basic Christian Ethics,* wrote an article some time ago for *Cross-roads,* a publication of the Board of Christian Education of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It was entitled, "Male and Female Created He Them", and it was reprinted in our Church's *Victory* for the first quarter of 1960.

The purpose of the article was different to the purpose of this study booklet. Its subject was Christian marriage and it sought to analyze the man-woman relationship which is basic to the Biblical teaching on marriage. At the same time there are things said in the article which have a distinct bearing on our problem and which overlap our study.

We quote herewith a relevant passage:
"If anyone imagines that he is not male or female, he imagines that he is *not.* Thus the imprint of community, of sexual community, is upon us. If we remain single, still we must see to it that we order our lives, not as individuals alone, but as male or female individuals, using the special talents of manhood or womanhood in the calling to which we may be directed.

Let us never think that we are 'souls' that happen to have bodies of one sort or another. Rather, let us remember that we are always male individuals or female individuals. God's creation in us of manhood or womanhood ought not to become a burden to us, from which we would like to escape, but ought rather to be received daily as the gift of the Creator and as the task He has assigned us. By having it said of Him after each day's work that He saw that it was good, He meant to teach man that it is wholly good to be male or female.

Likewise, God did not in a moment discover that 'it is not good that the man should be alone'; but by having said this, He meant to teach man that aloneness itself is not good. The kind of humanity that Adam was given is cohumanity; that is to say, he was not made to be alone. Adam and Eve have their humanity together. The kind of creatures they are as human beings impels them to seek community, including sexual community. Only then is the love of man's heart enlarged and fullest expression given to the powers of discourse and mutual happiness in being human."



Jewish attitudes to women in Bible times

A characteristic feature of the second-rate place women were given in Palestine is that in most cases they were not mentioned by name, only as side-people so to speak: the daughter of Jephtah ,the daughter of Pharaoh married by Solomon, the sorceress of Endor, etc. . . . this is very significant when you realise that to the Hebrews the *name* meant a lot, almost the personality. Another characteristic of women's names — or lack of names, is that of the few names we have, still fewer are composed with the word God (loved by God, etc.) whereas many men's names are such compounds. Does it mean that women were not considered worthy of it, or at any rate their access to God or His interest in them was through their husbands, fathers, brothers? It seems so.

These notes are drawn from a document prepared for the Committee On The Place Of Women In The Church by Mrs. John Coleman. Mrs. Coleman's work was a summary in English of material appearing in the book "Die Frau In Der Antiken Welt Und in Unchristentum," by Johannes Leipoldt, Koehler and Amalong, Leipzig, 1955.

In the days of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, it seems that women still had a certain freedom. She makes a vow to God (apparently on her own) to dedicate her son to Him if she gets one. But later on we see that it is expressly written that the vow of a woman is made invalid if the father or husband discovers it and does not approve.

This leads us to the next point. Wife or daughter are not required to obey the Law. Another interesting linguistic feature: in Hebrew the words meaning pious, righteous, holy, have no feminine form! A very few exceptions show us women bound by vows, but they really are exceptional.

In short, as the Greek woman is getting more and more freedom, the Jewish woman is getting less and less!

The restrictions to the life of women follow the shift from agrarian life into city life. We see that in the early Temple of Jerusalem just as in Shilo, women have access, even close to the presence of Jehovah. But in the Temple built by Herod the 1st, women do not have access to the court where men sat. They have a special place outside, 15 steps below! Similarly in the synagogues

women have to go up to the gallery (through an outside stairway) or on a separate side — according to the towns. Also any male can be called upon to do the public reading of scriptures, even young boys, but not women! Women are not counted as members of the congregation. They are not subjected to the same ritual obligations as men. Women are not to receive religious instruction: "if they are taught the Law all they learn is stupidities" says Rabbi Eliezar Ben Hyrkenos.

Naturally, being denied the normal official religious activities women made up for it with superstitious practices! Wo do find in the Old Testament a few women prophets, but the attitude of the tradition towards them is rather peculiar and the feeling, in general in later years, can be described by Rabbi Nachman who says that there were two arrogant women who were prophets: Deborah and Hulda, their names were significant, Deborah — meaning "bee" and Hulda — meaning "weasel".

Finally we read what Rabbi Judas Ben Elai, about middle 2nd century A.D., writes: "we must every day give thanks that: we are not pagan, we are not women, we are not uneducated!"

In the field of Law (court) women are not allowed to testify (cf. influence on Paul — I Cor. 15:4). The Muslims let them testify but the value of women's testimony is half that of men: two women for one man! It is even recommended not to speak with women, even very little with your own wife! No wonder the house-mistress does not sit at the table when there are guests. She can send a son to say something or ask something on her behalf! Also, it is not proper to have women serving meals. We are getting fast to a hidden life in harem with only household duties for occupation. Together with the harem comes the veil. Soon it is considered a special virtue always to have one's head covered, and finally it is a *must* not to appear in public unless veiled (cf. Paul).

Like almost everything Jewish, the attitude to women has a religious-ethical basis, or rather is justified in that way. In the story of the Fall, Eve is first at fault. Women are by nature unavoidably more often "unclean" than men and hence not in a condition to fulfill religious duties. This may be God's punishment—the sacrament of Circumcision which comes in later days to have a magic significance saving from Hell, cannot be performed on women. (There is, it is true, baptism for proselytes, but it does not affect Jewish women, who seem to be kept totally outside of sacramental life and its direct benefits).

The situation of the Jewish woman in the Hellenistic (Greek) communities is somewhat better as every effort is made to behave like the Pagans (cf. Philo). So women are part of the synagogue, etc., but there is very little difference in everyday life. In spite of the occasional parallels that can be drawn between the conditions of the Greek woman and the Jewish woman, there is no doubt that the non-Jewish woman is far better off.

There is, however, one category of women that is greatly respected by the Jews: the mothers. They may have quite a great indirect influence, the same applies to wives if they have an unusual personality. It is interesting to note that Jewish poets, *outside* of the rabbinical circles, portray two unusual women (Esther and Judith) who become heroes, precisely because they do *not* conform to the usual tradition.

Another contrast with the Greeks: A young (Hebrew) man must look for opposite qualities in his prospective wife to those a Greek is recommended to seek for. The wife is not meant to be a companion, but to produce children. A man buys his wife from her father. There is in fact rather little difference between a slave and a wife! But there are happy marriages too and we often see warnings against marriages without the pair having met before, as bringing unhappiness. Such meeting could take place at a special feast where the "daughters of Jerusalem" went in procession and danced.

THESE BIBLE STUDIES, prepared by the General Assembly's Committee on the Place of Women in the Church, are designed to help individuals and groups to examine some of the more important Bible passages which throw light on this subject.

BIBLE STUDY NO. 1

the true nature of mankind

We begin by considering three passages in the book of Genesis where the pattern of mankind, as God originally created us, is shown.

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD. Gen. 1:26-31; 5:1-2.

In verse 26, note that man is to be made in the image of God. This is what distinguishes man from the rest of creation.

A question must be raised here: Does this mean man in the sense of human male, or does it mean that mankind as a race was created in the image of God?

In verse 27 note the form of the sentence: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." This is an example of "parallelism," a common style method in Hebrew writing. The basic idea is repeated in slightly different form to heighten emphasis. Thus "male and female" might be taken to restate "the image of God" in a slightly different way.

So mankind, as "male and female," is made in the image of God. In Gen. 5:1-2 this appears again.

DISCUSS: The sexual aspect of human nature (male/female) is often thought of as existing for the biological function of procreation; or for the preservation of the race; etc. What is there in these two passages in Genesis that suggests a deeper meaning to sexuality than this? What then do we make of the fact that sexuality is common to other forms of life than mankind?

MAN AND WOMAN Gen. 2:18-25

In this second account of man's creation, note the phrase (verse 18) "It is not good that man should be alone." Contrast this "not good" with the other pronouncements: "God saw . . . it was very good" in chapter one.

Man's need for fellowship is not satisfied by his relationships with the rest of God's world—"but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him" (verse 20; RSV).

God is then spoken of as creating woman out of man so that Adam says: "this is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (RSV). Adam finds the answer to his need for fellowship in one who shares his humanity. More than this, the one given him by God becomes his counterpart, and in union with her he finds the fulfilment of his humanity—together, they become "one flesh" (verse 24). This implies that she also finds her fulfilment in union with him.

DISCUSS: This second story of man's creation is sometimes interpreted so as to view the female as inferior to the male. What is the logic of assuming that the "derivative" is inferior to that from which it is derived? What basis is there for assuming from this account that the creation of the female was an afterthought?

Can man find his fulfilment only in the "one-flesh" (marriage) union of male and female? What about the unmarried adult, widows, etc.?

After carefully considering these three passages, what conclusions would you draw about the meaning of human sexuality, and the relationship of man and woman in God's original design of mankind?

BIBLE STUDY NO. 2

the disordered nature of mankind

Read: Genesis 3; Rom. 1:19-32

The "Fall" is the term used by the Church to account for the contradiction between things as we see them in the world, and things as they were created, i.e. "very good." Something has happened to spoil the goodness.

The "Fall" is more than a mere accident. There is in it an element of guilt. There is a brokenness in the relation between God and man.

Genesis 3 asserts that this brokenness has been caused by man's disobedience, and further that the disobedience of man has resulted in disorder in the whole creation.

In Romans 1:28, it is asserted that the rejection of God's authority is the cause of the disorder in all of creation. When the harmony between God and man is broken, there is, within the inner life of man, consequent disharmony in all relationships—between man and the rest of creation, between man and man, and between male and female.

DISCUSS: The Hebrew-Christian tradition has tended to blame the female for the Fall. In the light of God's judgment on both male and female (Gen. 3:16-19), discuss whether this conclusion is justified?

How common, do you think, is the notion that sex prompts sin? What would you think of putting the matter the other way round: Sin has disturbed and distorted mankind's sexual life?

In the account of the Fall in Genesis 3, Adam blames his wife, and she in turn blames the serpent. Does this throw any light on our "battle of the sexes"—the mutual antagonisms and conflicts which exist between men and women? In what ways do you think sin and guilt upset the harmony of God's original man/woman creation?

BIBLE STUDY NO. 3

the redeemed nature of mankind

Christ came to be the Redeemer of mankind. As Redeemer, He restores the true harmony of life between God and man. This restoration results in a restoration of all human relationships including relationships between the sexes. For Scriptural background on this new life in Christ and these new human relationships, read: Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; Ephesians 4, 5; Philippians 2:1-11.

HEIRS TOGETHER OF GOD'S GRACE—Gal. 3:26-28

Here we are told that in Christ we are all sons of God by faith—regardless of race, status, sex. etc.

DISCUSS: When the text says, "there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (RSV), does this mean simply that men and women are equally the heirs of God's grace in every respect? Or does it mean that "in Christ" men and women are no longer to have the distinctive male and female roles assigned to them in the Creation?

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT—1 Cor. 12:1-13; Eph. 4:11-16

In these two passages, we see a picture of the Church in which each person has a distinctive contribution to make to the life of the whole Body of Christ. These distinctive contributions of individual Christians are determined by the "gifts" with which the Holy Spirit endows each one.

DISCUSS: In some churches, it seems to have been a tradition that the "gifts" are given to men only, and withheld from women. Considering these two passages carefully, what evidence can you find to support or deny this tradition? To what extent do you think your congregation's life expresses this New Testament picture of the Church — where men and women participate and serve on the basis of the Spirit's gifts?

CHRISTIAN MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS—Eph. 5:21-33

Verse 21. Paul says: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." (RSV). He was speaking of human relationships in general among Christians. Is there any basis for assuming that this did not include man-woman relationships in the Church?

DISCUSS: In church life as you know it, are man and woman subject to one another, or is woman more frequently subject to man?

Is this principle of being subject to one another just another way of saying "walk in love, as Christ loved us . . . " (Eph. 5:2, RSV)?

Verse 22. Having established the general principle that all Christians are to be subject to one another, Paul then speaks of husband-wife relationships. He says: "wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord" (RSV). This passage is sometimes interpreted to mean that wives are to be submissive and obedient to their husbands.

DISCUSS: In the light of the meaning of "being subject" in the previous verse, what does "wives, be subject to your husbands" mean among Christians? How do you relate the two instructions "be subject to one another" and "be subject to your husbands"?

Verse 23. "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church" (RSV). The Hebrew did not think of the various parts of the body in the same way as we do. We must be cautious in what we take "head" to mean here. In Ephesians 1:22-23, Christ's "headship" over the Church is linked with the idea of fulness (see also Ephesians 4:15-16). The word "head" does not appear to mean "boss" or "ruler" as it sometimes does for us, but suggests wholeness, completeness, and harmonious fulness of the body. In this sense, it is the head which links the members of the body together and enables them to function as a unit.

The question of "authority" should not be ignored or dismissed here. (It is considered more fully in study number 5.) But headship suggests more of leadership than it does rulership.

DISCUSS: To what extent is it true that women today often provide the real leadership in the family unit? What values do you see in the husband assuming a stronger leadership (headship) role in the family?

Verse 25. "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (RSV). Compare this instruction to husbands with the instructions to wives given above (be subject to your hubands—walk in love). Note also in verse 33 "let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (RSV).

DISCUSS: Putting these two sets of instructions together, how would you describe the Christian relationship between husband and wife, according to Paul?

WHAT DO YOU THINK? — CONCLUSIONS

What is your reaction to the following tentative conclusions:

a. Men and women are heirs of God's grace equally in all respects.

b. Men and women alike receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are the basis of service in Christ's Church.

c. Men and women alike are under the common rule that Christians are to be subject to one another. This means walking in love toward one another.

d. Christian wives are to be subject to their husbands, in this same sense of walking in love, and are to have respect for them.

e. Christian husbands are to be the "head" of the family, in the sense of leadership which leads to fulness of life for all. This headship is characterized by love and self-giving on the husband's part.

NOTE: These conclusions can only be tentative ones at this stage of your study, for there are other passages in Paul's letters which raise problems concerning his teachings about women in the Church. These will be considered in study number 5.

Jesus' view of women

Women had an honourable place in the life of Israel. But their role was limited almost entirely within the setting of home life. A woman's vocation in life was to be a wife and mother. Sterility therefore was a major catastrophe (and apparently was usually assumed to be the woman's fault).

In the teachings and the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees, women were regarded as both subordinate and inferior to men. Girls were not given the school education that boys received, and thus were deprived of the intimate knowledge of the Law which was the cornerstone of Jewish life. Thus women were segregated in the synagogue and were not permitted to participate verbally as the men did in the readings, prayers, etc. Women's appearances in public places were severely regulated. Rabbis and Pharisees would not think of being seen in a woman's company in a public place, much less engage her in conversation.

It is against this background that we must read the Gospel accounts of the many occasions where Jesus talked with women publicly, numbered them among His close friends, and even conversed kindly with women of ill-repute. Something remarkable and revolutionary in Jewish life arose in Jesus' attitude to women, and His dealings with them.

There is little in the New Testament to which we can turn for direct or explicit teaching by Jesus on "Women." We must therefore read the passages where we see women referred to in connection with Jesus' public ministry. From these passages we may be able to draw some general conclusions.

BIBLE PASSAGES TO CONSIDER

Luke 7:36-50

Here we find Jesus invited to eat in a Pharisee's house. A woman known to be immoral intrudes and tearfully worships Christ. Christ is kind to her, contrasting her behaviour with that of His host.

In view of the Pharisees' prevailing attitudes to women and also toward immoral behaviour, what significance would you attach to this episode as far as Jesus' attitude toward the woman was concerned?

Luke 10:38-42

Jesus is visiting in the home of Mary and Martha, and apparently teaching them. (Mary is pictured as sitting at His feet.)

In view of the normally secluded home life of Jewish women, what implications do you draw from this account regarding the status and role of women in Jesus' eyes? If we can infer from Verse 42 that He was discussing His message and teachings with them, what does this imply?

John 4:1-27

In this account Jesus is seen engaging a Samaritan woman in conversation. How many things in this encounter can you identify as being contrary to the Pharisees' views?

Luke 23:27-31

Among those who accompanied Jesus on the agonizing journey to Calvary were large numbers of women. What conclusions would you draw concerning the place which women had in the public ministry of Jesus?

Luke 23:49-24:11

(Parallel passages: Matt. 27:55-61; 28:1-10; Mark 15:40-47; 16:1-11.)

These passages make it plain that a large number of women had been among the followers who came up with Jesus to Jerusalem from Galilee. Apparently the women stayed close to Him throughout the crucifixion experience, and were the first to hear of the resurrection and one of them first met the risen Lord.

What evidence do you find in the Gospels regarding the place Jesus accorded to women in the larger band of His disciples? (See Luke 8:2.) Why do you think that Jesus did not include even one woman in choosing the twelve to be trained and to carry on His work?

In summary, what are your conclusions regarding Jesus' attitude toward women, and their status and roles in His public ministry? What conclusions would you draw about the whole question of the place of women in the Church?

BIBLE STUDY NO. 5

Paul's view of women

The passages considered in study number 3 led to some tentative conclusions. But there are other passages in Paul's letters which seem to be contradictory, and these must now be considered.

On the one hand, Paul follows the new path opened by Jesus, using women in missionary work (Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Euodia, Syntyche). He says men and women alike are heirs of God's grace, and recipients of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for service in the Church (study no. 3). He compares the husband-wife relationship to that of Christ and the Church.

On the other hand, Paul often seems to be still very much the Jewish rabbi in his references to women. Women are to be silent in the Church, neither participating in teaching nor public prayer with the men. Woman was made from man, and for man—not vice versa. In 1 Tim. 2:14, Paul even lays the blame for the Fall on the woman.

How can we account for these seeming contradictions and inconsistencies?

There are several passages which should be considered in thinking about this problem. To gain a general impression of the problem, read through the following passages: 1 Cor. 11:1-18; 14:34-35; 15:3-8; and 1 Tim. 2:8-15.

1 Corinthians 11:1-18

Here, the basic issue is the question of women having their heads covered "in Church." Paul insists that men are to have their heads uncovered, but women are to do the opposite. He supports this requirement with a series of arguments in typical rabbinic style.

These arguments are found in verses 7, 8 and 9. They are important for our study, quite apart from the question of head covering. Briefly they can be stated as follows:

a. Man is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.
b. Man was not made from woman, but woman from man.
c. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.
d. Because of the angels. (This reference is obscure to us and carries no explanation.)

DISCUSS: Compare these statements of Paul with some of your previous study. Refer to Study No. 1, concerning mankind's creation in the image of God, and the relationship of man and woman in the original creation.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

The main issue here is Paul's rule that women are to keep silence in the Church. He says it is "shameful" for women to speak in church, but does not say why. The only reason he gives for this rule of silence and subordination is that *the law* requires it. The law referred to appears to have been a rabbinic law, and not part of the Mosaic code.

On other matters, Paul has carefully worked out the Christian's new relationship to the law. He insists that Christians are no longer bound by rabbinic laws and customs. One of Paul's greatest battles was over the question of circumcision for Gentile Christians. He insisted that Gentiles were no longer bound to this law, and worked his doc-

trine out very carefully in the letter to the Galatians. It is true that Paul allowed Timothy to be circumcized (Acts 16:3), but this was an exception to his strong conviction on this matter.

In Romans 14, we also read how Paul worked out the Christian's new relationship to dietary and sabbath laws.

In view of all this, we may have some real questions in our mind when we hear Paul saying that women must be silent in the Church because the law requires it.

DISCUSS: What is your reaction to the proposal that Paul does not seem to have worked out his doctrine about women in the Church as carefully or consistently as he has other matters like circumcision for males, dietary laws and sabbath laws?

What would you say to the proposal that the Church today has to work out the place of women in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, much as the Church had to work out the question of slavery in the nineteenth century?

BIBLE STUDY NO. 6

some practical considerations

READ: LUKE 24:22-23

What significance do you think there is in the fact that it was women who first carried the news of Christ's resurrection?

READ: ACTS 16:11-15

Lydia was apparently a business woman. She seems to have been the head of a household. She was also the first convert of Paul in Europe. What light does this throw on the often-expressed opinion that Paul was a woman-hater?

READ: PHILIPPIANS 4:2-3

Is there anything in this account which suggests that women had a restricted sphere of action in the life of the Christian community? Or did they have the same freedom and responsibility as men? What significance do you find (a) for themselves, (b) for the Church, in Paul's concern that Euodias and Syntyche should become reconciled?

Can you think of other women who gave leadership in the early Church? List and discuss these.

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH TODAY

List the offices and activities of women in your church today. Then compare the list with the one given below.

a. They serve in the W.M.S., W.A., and Presbyterian Women; and their representatives serve on the Administrative Council, General Board of Missions, (and other Boards of General Assembly).

b. They serve as deaconesses doing a wide variety of church work.

c. They teach in the church school, lead children's and youth groups, serve on boards of managers, hold office in other church groups, sing in choirs, play the organ and direct the service of praise.

d. In the home, they often carry the main load of bringing up the children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

DISCUSS: What differences do you see between the place of women in the early Church, and in the Church today?

In view of the questions being raised today about ordaining women to the eldership, and to the "ministry," what evidence do you see in any of the passages studied which would support or be opposed to such ordination of women?

Do you think that people in the Church are confused between customs handed down to them, the new place of women in our society, and the place of women in the Church as it appears from these Bible studies?

Should the shortage of men for the "ministry" be given any weight in discussions about the place of women in the Church, especially concerning women's ordination?

recent reports

made to the General Assembly by the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church.

1961

The basic question facing us is this, "How is the Church to act in obedience to Jesus Christ in relation to the place and contribution of women in the life of the Church?". In other words, we believe that the matter of the place of women in the Church cannot be rightly dealt with on the basis of considerations of long-accepted custom, traditional or contemporary preferences held more or less strongly, sociological attitudes and pressures of our age with its general acceptance of women in all secular vocations, or isolated scripture texts so often used to justify opposite conclusions to the whole question. If the Church is to act in a truly churchly fashion the matter can only be properly dealt with in obedience to Jesus Christ Who is the Word of God as His Will is made known through the witness of the Holy Scriptures and as the Spirit attests the essential content of that witness to the Truth on any matter which concerns the Church. We believe the Assembly will agree with this position affirming as it does the Lordship of Christ which becomes definite and concrete through the testimony of the Bible, without falling into the impasse which an uncoordinated use of isolated proof texts inevitably produces on this question. Your Committee thus has accepted the responsibility of a biblical approach to the matter in what we believe to be a true understanding of what this means in our reformed tradition of scriptural authority with its insistence on the primacy of Christ and the unifying testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Against this background, your Committee has stated its purpose in these terms: "To define the place of women in the Church in such a way that in the totality and unity of the Church's life and of the Christian life as a whole women can exercise their gifts to the fullest possible extent as members of the Church of Jesus Christ." We have thus set the matter before us in the widest possible context. The purport of the statement of purpose is to indicate that we understand our task to be that of describing the role women are called to play within the whole purpose of God both in the Church as an institution and in the world. This will mean much more than consideration of such questions as the ordination of women to the ruling and teaching eldership though it will include it. It will mean consideration of the whole role of women as members of the body of Christ called by God to serve His purpose in obedience to Him both within the organizational life of the Church and within its total mission to the world. In other words, the task of the Committee, as we see it, is really to set forth a biblical doctrine of the place of women in the purpose of God. Only on this fundamental basis, we believe, can an adequate statement of the place of women in the Church be expressed. Because the Church has such an essential place in the purpose of God these two matters are of course inextricably bound together, if not identical. We believe, however, that it will be helpful to bear in mind the very fundamental nature of the question which faces us.

Thus far, discussion has centred around the question of authority as it bears upon the function which God has created and called women to fulfil. This in turn has led to a consideration of the nature of authority itself. At this point the importance of the biblical approach becomes especially manifest in making clear the truth which the Church may find contains the answer to the whole question. The natural world and the "strange new world of the Bible" hold diametrically opposed views on the nature of authority. In the natural world, authority signifies efficient power over the lives of others and therefore has in it obvious implications of domination and subjection. In the biblical world, human authority is always ministerial in the

sense of signifying service, since, in final analysis, only God rules and human authority is always exercised in terms of the service human beings owe to Him and to one another. The power to rule in the Church and in the fulfillment of the purpose of God for the world is, in the light of biblical truth, identical with the power to serve.

> "Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. . . ." Mark 10:42-45.

The power to serve may be described as the divinely-given capacity to serve both the Word of God and human beings in the fulfillment of God's purpose for the world. In both cases the only final authority is the authority of God Himself Who rules in a sovereignty of love in which in Jesus Christ He took upon Him the form of a servant. All human authority is thus ministerial in terms of service to the servant Lord, to His people in the Church, and to His people in the world. Human sovereignty or authority within the purpose of God must always be the obedient instrument through which the authority of God which is the only final authority, is made manifest and effective.

At the time this report was prepared your Committee was in the midst of considering the implications of this understanding of authority in regard to the place of women in the purpose of God and in the life of the Church. We have reached agreement that when the Bible speaks of man it means genus man as including male and female. We have reached agreement that this fact does not negate but rather affirms the distinctive roles male and female were created and redeemed to fulfill in the purpose of God. We are in process of considering what these roles are in terms of authority as between men and women but are already agreed, on the basis of the biblical teaching outlined above, that whatever the answer may be authority must be freed from the worldly concepts of domination and submission and understood in terms of service which constitutes its essential meaning in the purpose of God.

1962

All members of the consultation have recognized that the question committed to us requires biblical study in depth in arriving at a clear understanding of the place of woman in the purpose of God and in the life and work of the Church as the instrument and servant of that purpose. Before such matters can be dealt with, the biblical understanding of man (male and female constituting the full nature of human being) has to be made clear in relation to both creation and redemption. Such a study naturally raises the question of the nature and scope of biblical authority and in particular of the degree, if any, to which the biblical writers were influenced by contemporary attitudes and problems in giving guidance to the Church regarding the status and role of women in its life and work. For example, was Paul as clear in his own mind and teaching regarding the implications of the Gospel for the place of women in the Church as for the place of Gentiles in the Church? Or did his rabbinic upbringing and the varied pressures of the contemporary situation combine to colour and influence his attitude in regard to women? These are the kind of questions on which your Committee is seeking light through study of the biblical material together with scholarly works which describe the religious and secular background of the Church's life in apostolic times. We report progress this year and hope to make a final report to the next General Assembly.

We feel that if this work is to prove fruitful in the future life of our Church the general membership should share as far as possible in the process by which the final conclusion will be reached. Any finding of ours which does not prove convincing to the Church at large would naturally be unproductive and could be divisive. With this in mind, we are preparing material for guidance

in biblical study at the Presbytery and congregational level. It can surely be taken for granted that all our people desire the will of God to be done in regard to the place of women in the Church. We must strive for unanimity in the understanding of His will and then have the courage to act in obedience to it.

1963

Your Committee has now reached the point at which it desires to call our Church to take a major step forward in regard to the whole question of the place of women in the Church. By this we mean a call to the Church to expose herself humbly and seriously to what God would say to us through the Scriptures on this important matter. During the past years such exposure has been fruitful in guiding the Committee in its thinking and in the light of our experience we believe it important for the Church to undergo the same discipline. To this end we have prepared a study booklet which places in a biblical focus the basic issues we have faced in our work. We are asking that this study guide be given wide use throughout the Church. Our procedure at this point arises out of the conviction that the responsibility of the Committee is not to tell the Church what she ought to do but to help the Church find, and act in accordance with, the truth of the gospel in regard to the place of women in her life and work.

The basic and determining truth which has impressed itself upon us is that in the biblical understanding of man, male and female form a partnership each completing the other to form together the full expression of human being. There is a distinctiveness about each but from the biblical point of view this can never be represented in terms of superiority and inferiority, dominant and subservient but only in terms of characteristic qualities and functions mutually dependent and forming together the unity and wholeness of human life. This we believe to be the basic biblical truth which must govern all man-woman relationships if these are to be in harmony with the revealed purpose of God.

In the light of this the first and obvious fact is that women have a full place in the Church which is humanity restored to God's intention for it. Men and women alike are the objects and servants of the purpose of God which the Church has been created to express and fulfill. Any belief or practice which denies this truth is a distortion of the Church's true nature.

The real question before the Church is what this should mean in actual practice. It seems to mean that all aspects of the Church's life and work should be open to women and yet, as we all know, scripture can be quoted against scripture on this point. We believe that in facing this biblical problem the Church must strive and come to know by the Holy Spirit what the gospel has to say on this issue and, in thought and action, be governed by its truth.